

USDAnews

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

USDA's Proposed Budget For FY 2010 Emphasizes Priorities, New Initiatives

by Ron Hall

Office of Communications

There's a particular document that USDA publishes annually that's usually about 1/4" thick, is held together by a single thick staple, and has on its cover a rather simple, uncluttered design. But it's considered a 'must-read' document every year because it spells out the proposed budget for the Department.

This year's 115-page version, titled "*FY 2010—Budget Summary And Annual Performance Plan*," lays out the proposed budget, in detail, for FY 2010 for USDA. Prepared by the Office of Budget and Program Analysis, it was released on May 7, 2009, and it contains the budgetary details, as proposed, for the Department's mission areas, program agencies, and staff offices.

"The Administration released its governmentwide budget outline for 2010 in late February," explained OBPA Director **Scott Steele**. "It contained the Administration's general goals and priorities, with the intent that specific budgetary details, about each federal department and agency, would follow later."

Then, as the initial step in the responsibility by Congress to turn the annual federal budget proposal into actual law, Congress passed its "budget resolution" for the FY 2010 federal budget

on April 29, 2009. "But keep in mind," Steele clarified, "that Congress's budget resolution is a nonbinding document that does not require the President's signature and does not have the force of law." "Instead," he added, "the 'budget resolution' sets guidelines and offers a blueprint for lawmakers for the spending bills and other legislation that would generally follow, in Congress, later in the year."

Steele said that since USDA released its detailed publication in May, the Budget Summary has been serving as a resource document as well as a supplement to testimony about USDA's proposed FY 2010 budget, which Secretary **Tom Vilsack** and other USDA officials have been providing before Congressional Committees throughout this calendar year.

Steele said that USDA's FY 2010 proposed budget calls for an estimate of nearly \$132.9 billion in spending, which includes funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. "This is an estimated \$16.6 billion more than the Department's currently estimated spending for FY 2009," he advised.

Roughly 80 percent of those proposed expenditures—or \$105 billion in 2010—would be for mandatory programs that



Assuming that **Darth Vader** has a sweet tooth, he's about to receive a piece of Halloween candy, compliments of FSA's **Earl Reed**, as they both stand in front of the USDA Service Center in Roger Mills County, OK. Reed will also include, in the handout, a copy of "FSA Kids." It's all part of a unique 'Halloween Outreach' initiative by USDA employees at that Service Center, designed to promote the role of agriculture plus the USDA services available to their local community. Note the story on page 4—and mark your calendar: Halloween 2009 is only about four months away.—**PHOTO BY MISTY SPRINGER**

provide services required by law. They include many of the Department's nutrition assistance, commodity, export promotion, and conservation programs. USDA's discretionary programs account for the remaining 20 percent—or \$28 billion—in 2010. They include the Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC, program; rural development loans and grants; research and education; soil and water conservation technical assistance; management of National Forests; domestic marketing assistance; and programs that address pest and disease threats.

USDA's budget proposes a staffing level for FY 2010 of 104,751 total staff years, including non-federal county employees. This is a decrease of 789 staff years from the currently estimated FY 2009 total staff year level of 105,540.

Agencies that reflect proposed increases in total staff years for FY 2010 include Departmental Administration (an increase of 55 staff years, to total 580 staff years), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (30, to total 1,174), the Office of the Chief

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Tom Vilsack *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees, Hunger is a problem that the American sense of fairness should not tolerate and American ingenuity should be able to overcome. This belief was the driving force behind Agriculture Secretary **Clifford Hardin's** proposal, on July 14, 1969, for a new agency at USDA that would attempt to bring "an end to hunger in America...for all time." The agency he proposed was the Food and Nutrition Service, which celebrates its 40th anniversary of service to the Department and to the country this August.

Federal food assistance programs first began within USDA during the Great Depression, when federal food donations were authorized to help feed a hungry nation and help farmers who were unable to sell their products. But by the late 1960s, a renewed focus on hunger in America suggested a need to create an entirely separate agency to give stronger emphasis to food assistance. Accordingly, USDA officials organized approximately 1,200 staffers and several existing programs from USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service into a newly-created "Food and Nutrition Service." That new agency was given exclusive responsibility for federal food programs.

Fast forward 40 years and FNS is still the nation's first line of defense against hunger. FNS, and 15 nutrition assistance programs it oversees, work to provide children and low-income Americans with access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education while supporting American agriculture. They administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the school meals programs and summer feeding programs, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program, among others.

FNS programs account for two-thirds of USDA's budget and reach 1 in 5 Americans over the course of a year. Just this month, SNAP benefits alone reached more than 32 million Americans. This is a testament to FNS's commitment to ensuring that all eligible people know about nutrition assistance programs, and their work to target underserved individuals, including elderly persons, the working poor, and

members of historically disadvantaged groups in this country.

FNS has made great strides in 40 years. The diets of the poor Americans improved markedly between 1969 and 1978, a period that marked the nationwide expansion of the Food Stamp Program and the introduction of WIC. Their Commodity Distribution Programs have distributed over \$50 billion in food for households and emergency feeding programs, while their National School Lunch Program has served over 169 billion meals. Though hunger remains a significant problem in the United States, it is no longer of the magnitude that it was before FNS was established. And the work of FNS continues to be central to what we do here at USDA.

Although they deserve our appreciation, the 1,300 employees of FNS do not accomplish all this alone. On this anniversary we should also remember the solid partnerships FNS enjoys with cooperating organizations, States, and other partners. We should recognize their outreach activities to coordinate with faith-based and community-based organizations to promote critical participation in our nutrition assistance programs.

Today FNS continues to face great challenges. In the near term, the current financial crisis has increased the potential for food insecurity. FNS has responded by managing SNAP to our highest enrollment levels ever while simultaneously implementing an increase in benefits for all recipient families. In the longer term, I look forward to working with FNS to meet the goal, set by President **Barack Obama**, that we eliminate child hunger in America by 2015. This ambitious goal will require the hard work, ingenuity, and passion of all FNS employees—as well as action on the part of Congress and the American people—but I have no doubt that we will rise to the challenge.

I would like all of USDA to recognize these significant accomplishments. Good going, FNS. Have a great 40th anniversary. And keep working hard to ensure that Americans are eating nutritious and healthy foods—and to move us towards a reality where no American goes to sleep at night hungry. ■

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Economist (28, to total 82), the Food Safety and Inspection Service (25, to total 9,696), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (25, to total 1,041), the Agricultural Marketing Service (21, to total 3,104), and the Food and Nutrition Service (20, to total 1,328).

Agencies with proposed decreases in total staff years for FY 2010 include the Natural Resources Conservation Service (a decrease of 528 staff years, to total 11,590 staff years), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (409, to total 7,455), and the Forest Service (104, to total 33,601).

The number of Farm Service Agency non-federal county employees is projected to stay at the FY 2009 level of 9,425.

These staff year estimates are all subject to adjustments to reflect the final outcome of budget negotiations, plus such unpredictable factors as natural disasters and other emergencies.

Highlights of USDA's FY 2010 budget proposal, thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees, include:

① \$45.8 million to implement a new Departmentwide cyber security initiative. Through this initiative, USDA is to conduct network security assessments to examine and identify any vulner-

abilities in its network and systems; procure and deploy advanced security tools to enable comprehensive system monitoring; and establish a USDA Security Operations Center to provide around-the-clock cyber security support and staffing.

② \$3 million to establish the Office of Advocacy and Outreach. The mission of this new office is to increase the accessibility of USDA programs to socially disadvantaged producers, small-scale producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers. This new office, required by the 2008 Farm Bill, is also to serve as an advocate for underserved constituents, but is to be separate from

USDA's Office of Civil Rights—which, itself, is to remain focused on the rights of USDA employees and on service to all USDA customers.

③ an increase of \$2 million, to total \$24 million, for the Office of Civil Rights. The increase is to help USDA move from a paper-based process of managing civil rights records, regarding allegations of discrimination in employment and program services, to a digital complaints records system.

④ \$67.3 million to continue the Farm Service Agency Information Technology modernization known as MIDAS, and to

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Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

Rural Community Forums:

Secretary **Tom Vilsack** has been holding a series of forums in rural communities around the country. The purpose of the forums has been to discuss efforts by this Administration to rebuild and revitalize rural America, listen to local residents talk about how USDA can assist them, and discuss solutions to challenges facing their particular communities.

As of June 29, 2009 Vilsack has held six such forums. The first was held in Brush, CO on May 11—followed by forums in Portageville, MO on May 12; Ludowici, GA on May 18; Harrodsburg, KY on May 27; Geneseo, IL on June 1; and Danville, IN on June 2.

At each rural community forum Vilsack has generally discussed how USDA provides leadership on food, agriculture, and natural resources and touches the life of every American, and how the Department is working to: promote a sustainable, safe, sufficient, and nutritious food supply, ensure that America leads the global fight against climate change, and revitalize rural communities by expanding economic opportunities. He then has generally pointed out particular American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) efforts that are underway across the country in general and in that geographic area in particular.

Darrell Mowery, the Public Information Coordinator for Rural Development in Indiana, based in the RD State Office in Indianapolis, helped to coordinate the forum held in central Indiana. He estimated that nearly 200 persons attended that event, and they included farmers, leaders of local farm-oriented organizations, local elected officials, FFA members, and other interested citizens.

Vilsack told local participants at the Indiana event that “To rebuild and revitalize rural America, President [**Barack**] **Obama** and I want those affected by decisions made in Washington to participate in the process of developing innovative solutions and charting a path for communities to participate and thrive in the new 21st century economy.”

Working Group’s Website:

This past March President **Barack Obama** announced the formation of a Food Safety Working Group to advise him on how to upgrade the nation’s food safety laws for the 21st century, foster coordination throughout the government, and ensure that the federal

government is not just designing laws that will keep the American people safe, but is also enforcing those laws.

More recently, this May that Working Group, led by Secretary **Tom Vilsack** and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary **Kathleen Sebelius**, launched a website to provide information about the group’s activities and progress.

Vilsack noted that the Working Group is to be “an important tool for gathering ideas as to how we can strengthen the food safety system to be more accountable and accessible to the public it protects, flexible enough to quickly resolve new safety challenges that emerge, and able to meet the robust needs of our rapidly changing world.”

The website—www.foodsafetyworkinggroup.gov—is designed to be a resource for those who want to learn about the current food safety network as well as stakeholders and organizations which are working to upgrade America’s food safety system.

Then on July 7 the Food Safety Working Group made public its key findings and its recommendation of a new, public health-focused approach to food safety based on three core principles: (1) prioritizing prevention; (2) strengthening surveillance and enforcement; and (3) improving response and recovery. It also announced specific steps designed to advance its core principles. Details are available at the aforementioned website.

Food For Progress:

USDA is to provide \$27.5 million in international assistance for Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Department’s Food for Progress Program.

Secretary **Tom Vilsack** made the announcement on May 7 at a meeting with Afghanistan’s Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock **H.E. Mohammad Asif Rahimi** and Pakistan’s Minister for Food,



Secretary **Tom Vilsack** (right) speaks to attendees at the May 15 dedication of the USDA National Plant Materials Center in Beltsville, MD in honor of **Norman A. Berg**. Sharing the platform are Deputy Secretary **Kathleen Merrigan** (left) and Berg’s daughter **Pamela Lieb**. Berg served as Chief of NRCS—known then as the Soil Conservation Service—from 1979-82. According to NRCS Historian **Douglas Helms**, Berg counseled farmers and ranchers on how to save their eroding land and was an advocate of conservation districts that help local communities manage natural resources. Helms added that Berg dedicated more than 70 years of his life to the stewardship of working farm and ranch land, until his death in March 2008 at age 90. Congress made renaming of the National Plant Materials Center a provision of the 2008 Farm Bill.

—PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS

Agriculture, and Livestock **Nazar**

Muhammad Gondal as they were identifying potential areas of agricultural cooperation and collaboration among the three countries.

Pat Sheikh, Deputy Administrator for the Office of Capacity Building and Development in the Foreign Agricultural Service, noted that these particular Food for Progress allocations are for roughly 17,400 metric tons of U.S. vegetable oil that will be purchased on the U.S. market and donated by USDA—approximately 10,600 metric tons for Afghanistan and 6,800 metric tons for Pakistan. She explained that the commodities will go to the governments in both countries; the vegetable oil will be sold to local agribusinesses.

“Proceeds from the sale will be used to implement agricultural and rural development projects,” she said. “The commodity donations will benefit an estimated three million people in rural areas of both countries.”

“Food for Progress has consistently helped developing countries advance economic reform and expand private enterprise,” Sheikh noted. “It has, in its 24 years of existence, played an important role in helping developing countries support their agricultural sectors.” ■

—RON HALL

Employees *make these things happen*

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS

That Iron Pot On Your Stove Might Enrich What You're Cooking In It

Do you think you suffer from iron deficiency? Sure, you could take some iron pills, or eat more foods that are rich in iron.

But, especially for those who live in resource-poor areas, it might help to cook with iron pots instead of aluminum pots.

That's the conclusion of a study conducted at the Agricultural Research Service's Robert W. Holley Center for Agriculture and Health in Ithaca, NY. ARS Physiologist **Ray Glahn** was a collaborator in that study.

"The study compared what we might call the 'bioavailability' of iron in Chinese cabbage meals cooked in pots made of either iron or aluminum," he recounted. "The researchers cooked three Chinese cabbage dishes—fresh Chinese cabbage, fresh Chinese cabbage with vinegar, and fermented Chinese cabbage, which we'd also call sauerkraut. They cooked the items identically in iron pots and in aluminum pots, following a common recipe from northwestern China."

The conclusion: cabbage dishes cooked in iron pots had more available iron than those cooked in aluminum pots.

Glahn noted that the type of food being

cooked also seemed to affect the pot's iron. "Vinegar or acidic foods such as sauerkraut appeared to leach more iron from the pots," he affirmed. "That made more iron available for absorption into the foods being cooked."

Glahn pointed out that in order to measure the 'bioavailable' iron, the researchers used the ARS lab's 'bioassay.' That's a system that couples simulated digestion with a human intestinal cell line. Glahn, who designed that system in 1999, explained that at the time it was designed, the 'bioassay' was one of the first systems to accurately model in the lab what occurs in the human intestinal tract. He added that, ten years later, it is still the leading bioassay for iron absorption.

Glahn said the researchers used recipes from northwestern China because of surveys that showed significantly lower rates of iron deficiency in resource-poor regions there, compared to similar regions elsewhere in that country. Plant-based diets that include lots of rice vinegar and sauerkraut cooked in iron pots are common in that region.

So, does the conclusion from this study merely fall into the category of 'nice to know', or might it have significant ramifications?

"Iron deficiency is the leading nutritional deficiency in the world, and it's among the

developing world's most prevalent nutritional problems," Glahn replied. "It's associated with reduced capacity for physical labor and can lead to illness and death. And even in developed countries it remains a serious concern for women during pregnancy and throughout their childbearing years."

"It's extremely important that pregnant women and children receive proper iron nutrition," he added. "So if cooking with an iron pot might help that to happen, then this research finding warrants appropriate visibility and dissemination." ■

—RON HALL



ARS's **Ray Glahn** was a collaborator in the study which examined whether cooking food in iron pots instead of aluminum pots might help persons suffering from iron deficiency.—**PHOTO BY KEITH WELLER**

FARM AND FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

Halloween Is A New Form Of Outreach For USDA In The Sooner State

As of June 30, there are only 123 days left until Halloween.

Yeah, yeah, that may be rushing the Trick-or-Treat season bigtime. But Halloween is the time for a unique effort at outreach by USDA employees in Roger Mills County, OK. Here's why.

Robert Payne, the County Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency in that county, is based at the USDA Service Center in Cheyenne, OK. He took that job in late August 2005—about 70 days before Halloween.

"As FSA's new CED here in Roger Mills County, I didn't question that our citizens already knew that we had an office here," he recounted. "But I did question whether they really knew how much we could do for them, both as USDA in general and as FSA in particular."

"And, as part of the message that ag can affect them every day, I thought I'd target kids and focus specifically on how candy is part of agriculture and USDA promotes agriculture—so that might help kids to see a tie-in between their sweet tooth and the mission of USDA."

Payne became aware of the tradition in Cheyenne that local merchants located on Main Street would give candy to local Trick-or-Treaters on Halloween. "Our USDA Service Center—which is also located on Main Street—hadn't participated in that activity before I arrived," he advised. "So in our office we came up with the idea to participate in that event as a way for us to reach out to our community."

"Right after school let out on Halloween Day, the local kids would visit all the businesses on Main Street," noted FSA Program Technician **Earl Reed**. The participating

merchants and USDA had all registered their involvement with their local Chamber of Commerce. "We all had candy treats that we'd give the kids as they passed by each store or office," he said. "And when the kids came by our USDA office, we handed 'em candy—plus an activity booklet titled 'FSA Kids'."

Reed explained that the activity booklet contains basic information about agriculture in general and FSA in particular, written with a young audience in mind. In addition, FSA staffers handed, to the adults accompanying their young Trick-or-Treaters, flyers—written with an adult consumer in mind. The flyers noted, among other things, that many candy ingredients are derived from nature—and therefore are related to agriculture.

Reed added that FSA has been paying for the activity booklets and the USDA Service Center employees have been paying for the

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Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Dallas Tonsager is the Under Secretary for Rural Development.

Before rejoining USDA, from 2004 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate

for this position Tonsager served as a board member of the Farm Credit Administration, which is responsible for regulating and examining the cooperative Farm Credit System. He also served from 2004-09 as a member of the Board of Directors of the Farm Credit System Insurance Corporation.

Tonsager was Executive Director from 2001-04 of the Huron-based South Dakota Value-Added Agriculture Development Center, where he coordinated initiatives to increase the economic value and consumer appeal of agricultural products from South Dakota. He served as the Rural Development State Director for South Dakota, based in Huron, from 1993-2001. From 1988-93 he was President of the South Dakota Farmers Union, based in Huron. He also served on the board of the National Farmers Union Insurance from 1989-

93 and was a member of the advisory board of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission from 1990-93. In partnership with his brother **Doug** he currently owns Plainview Farm in Oldham, SD, a family operation that includes corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay.

Tom Dorr, the previous Under Secretary for RD, now works as a consultant in the Washington, DC area, concentrating on rural energy, rural finance, and rural development issues. ■



Rajiv Shah is the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics and USDA's Chief Scientist.

Before joining USDA, from January 2006 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Shah served as Director of the Agricultural Development Program at The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, based in Seattle, where he led a multi-billion dollar global effort to invest in agri-

cultural science and development in order to reduce hunger and poverty. From 2005-06 he served as the Foundation's Director of Strategic Opportunities, after having served from 2001-04 as its Deputy Director of Policy and Finance for Global Health. In those two roles he helped create the Foundation's Global Development Program and the International Finance Facility for Immunization—an independent global financing organization. This has raised more than \$5 billion for child immunization since 2005 and has the potential to save more than five million lives around the world over the next decade.

Before joining the Foundation in 2001, Shah worked as a health care policy advisor on the Gore 2000 presidential campaign. He co-founded Health Systems Analytics—a Philadelphia-based data analysis consulting firm—in 1997, and also Project IMPACT for South Asian Americans—an East Coast-based non-profit organization that helps promote community service—in 1996. He worked as a volunteer for the World Health Organization

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candy they hand out to the kids.

"While all of the merchants and offices who participated shared some general goals during this effort, we at USDA had a three-fold purpose in this particular outreach activity," noted FSA Program Technician **Misty Springer**. "First, we wanted to make our community aware of our presence and of our role as caring neighbors. Second, we wanted to educate our community about the vast interconnection of agriculture to daily life. Third, we wanted to have a little fun."

All the lil' Trick-or-Treaters were dressed up in their Halloween costumes as they made their rounds down Main Street. And when they got to the USDA office they were handed candy treats by Reed, dressed up in a cowboy hat, boots, jeans, and a leather vest. So, was he in costume also, in the spirit of the moment?

"Well," he laughed, "actually, that's pretty much what I wear to work every day. But if someone wants to think that this was my Halloween costume, that works just fine for me!"

Payne said that 130 adults and children, out of a town of 800 individuals, were contacted during FSA's first participation in its 'Halloween Outreach' in 2005. According to FSA Program Technician **Patti Zimms**, the

event has taken place each year since, and not only has participation grown by merchants and by the kids, but USDA's involvement has grown as well. That's because employees of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which is also located in that USDA Service Center, help to hand out candy to the kids. And do they also hand out an NRCS equivalent to the 'FSA Kids' booklet?

NRCS Soil Conservation Technician **Jerry Swartwood** replied that, starting this Halloween, in addition to the candy, NRCS employees will be giving the Trick-or-Treaters a conservation-oriented booklet titled 'The World Beneath Your Feet' which is prepared by the local conservation district. "And, for the adults who are walking with them, we'll give 'em a terrific NRCS stress ball made of rubber," he quipped.

In addition, employees with the Upper Washita Conservation District, a state office which is co-located in the USDA Service Center, have gotten into the

spirit of the event. "I get a kick out of putting on my scary mask and handing out candy in front of our building," laughed Conservation District Engineering Aide **Todd Goodall**.

Halloween 2009 falls on a Saturday. So how might that affect this year's outreach effort by the local merchants and by USDA? "Looks like Friday afternoon will serve as the magic date for all our little ghosts and goblins," Payne quipped. "And we'll be ready then—with our candy treats and our informative lit." ■

—**RON HALL**



FSA's **Earl Reed**—who may or may not be dressed in a Halloween costume himself but whose outfit includes a homemade bullwhip in his right hand—awaits the arrival of Trick-or-Treaters at the USDA Service Center in Roger Mills County, OK.

—**PHOTO BY MISTY SPRINGER**

on a rural health and development project in rural South India in 1995.

Gale Buchanan, the previous Under Secretary for REE, has returned to the University of Georgia at its Tifton campus, where he serves as the Dean and Director Emeritus of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. ■



Pearlle Reed is the Assistant Secretary for Administration.

Before rejoining USDA, from 2003 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Reed worked as consultant in his own consulting firm based in Marion, AR, focusing on the areas of agriculture, conservation, economic development, and management.

Reed served as the 11th Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service from 1998-2002. From 1997-98 he was Acting Assistant Secretary for Administration. During that time he provided leadership to more than 300 USDA employees who had worked to put in place 85 of the 92 recommendations of USDA's Civil Rights Action Team. [Then] Secretary **Dan Glickman** had created that team to advise him on USDA civil rights issues.

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PROFILE PLUS More About: Kevin Curtin



This past February **Kevin Curtin** made available, at USDA's TARGET Center, "Accessaphone" technology, in order that any employee, including individuals with visual, dexterity, or hearing limitations, can have access to a computer-based telephone system. In July 2008 he coordinated the launch of "Web Connect" at the TARGET Center, which allows any employee, who has Internet access with Adobe Flash Player installed on his/her computer, to access live, interactive training events presented by the TARGET Center.

These initiatives are part of Curtin's contributions to USDA's TARGET Center since he became the Director of TARGET Programs for the Department two years ago. The "Technology Accessible Resources Give Employment Today" ("TARGET") Center, located at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, is a state-of-the-art demonstration facility featuring the latest in technologies which enhance accessibility for employees with physical and learning disabilities. It also offers activities that promote education and awareness on the subject of accessibility. "This includes," Curtin noted, "helping USDA offices comply with requirements to promote 'reasonable accommodation' in the work force. See, we're in the business of helping to remove barriers that are in the way of employees with disabilities."

USDA's TARGET Center opened in October 1992. **Ophelia Falls** served as its first Director until 2000 when she was succeeded by **Bruce McFarlane**. Curtin assumed the helm in April 2007. He noted that USDA also ran a Midwest TARGET Center, located in St. Louis, from 1995 until it closed in August 2007. Both facilities, he emphasized, have provided employees with the opportunity to experience the benefits of such accessibility tools as computers operated by voice recognition, a 'no-hands' computer mouse, and a portable hand-held device that magnifies and reads documents aloud. In addition, ergonomically designed items at the TARGET Center such as keyboards, wrist supports, and furniture designed to prevent disabling conditions such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, repetitive stress injuries, back strain, and eye strain can normally be ordered through USDA agency-level procurement specialists. "But with the evolution of technology, especially web-connect technology," he said, "we're now better able to serve all USDA employees, across the country, from our facility here at headquarters."

Curtin said that about six percent of USDA's employees have self-identified physical or mental disabilities.

While acknowledging that several other federal departments have TARGET-like centers to service their own employees, Curtin pointed out that USDA's TARGET Center and the Department of Defense's TARGET-like center—which is located at the Pentagon—are the two

largest in the federal government. "Our TARGET Center," he emphasized, "has the most cutting-edge technologies of all the others—so we serve as the showplace and the education place for those technologies."

Curtin explained that he is dyslexic, both spatially and literally. "In other words," he clarified, "I tend to reverse letters when I'm reading and writing and, for instance, a circle might look like a triangle to me." Noting that he is 44, he observed that, if a TARGET Center had been available when he began his career—or if today's technology had been available when he was growing up—his condition might have been more accurately diagnosed and treated earlier. "Growing up, I just coped, not fully realizing that what I experienced had a name and possible treatments," he added. "In fact, I'm convinced that there are employees of my age and older, here at USDA, who have similar learning disabilities to mine, and they don't really know it—even as they've been coping and adjusting to them their whole lives. So there are lots of fellow employees out there, with physical and/or learning disabilities, who we could help—if they'd contact us at the TARGET Center."

Curtin was born in Washington, DC and went to school there, earning a B.A. degree in history from Catholic University. He then spent seven years as a Jesuit in Chicago and then in Baltimore, where his activities included teaching math and science at an inner-city parochial middle school in Baltimore. "That's where I began to develop an interest in the deaf community," he said. So he worked as a full-time sign language interpreter for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in Washington, DC from 1999-2005. He then was the Disability Program Manager for the U.S. Department of Labor from 2005 until joining USDA. "And now I have the best job—for me—in the federal government," he declared. "I get paid to learn about the coolest assistive technologies out there—and then I get to apply those technologies to help applicants with disabilities get hired at USDA, plus help current USDA employees with disabilities perform their jobs better!"

Last Book Read: "Ford: The Men and the Machine" by **Robert Lacey**.

Last Movie Seen: "Hotel For Dogs"—with my 8-year-old daughter **Nell**."

Recent Hobbies: "Coaching the 'Jaguars'—Nell's softball team."

Something I Don't Want People To Know About Me: "I can be pretty messy—and I believe in 'Entropy', which is the tendency of the universe toward disorder. So sometimes the 'entropy' in my office is pretty formidable. But, ummm, there's definitely *no* entropy at home—since my wife **Ellen** wouldn't put up with it..."

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "Continuing to work on ways to deliver TARGET Center services to USDA employees here at headquarters and beyond the Beltway." ■

—**RON HALL**

provide for stabilization of its existing computing environment.

⑤ \$13 million in Departmental Administration funding to continue supporting the Department's efforts, coordinated by the Foreign Agricultural Service, to assist in agricultural reconstruction activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. USDA continues to provide technical advisors assigned to Government Ministries in Iraq and to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that are operating in the rural provinces of Afghanistan and Iraq. USDA employees are advisors who serve temporary assignments on those PRTs. The May-June 2008 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about that initiative.

⑥ an increase of \$7.4 billion, to total \$61.4 billion, in the FNS-administered Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, to support an anticipated 2.4 million increase in monthly participation.

⑦ increasing funding to support efforts in APHIS to mitigate and eliminate plant and animal threats, including an additional \$10 million, to total \$30 million, to combat the Asian longhorned beetle in the Northeast; an additional \$3 million, to total \$13 million, to address the growing problem of cattle fever ticks along the Mexican border; and continued funding for Emerald Ash Borer control and eradication activities at \$35 million.

⑧ a new \$11 million initiative, above the 2009 base funding of \$30 million, for USDA research that emphasizes the development of feedstocks with traits for optimal production and conversion to biofuels and systems that address resource management, productivity, and sustainability issues.

⑨ \$13 million for new USDA research to strengthen the adoption of the federal "Dietary Guidelines for Americans" among children, define family-based interventions to prevent obesity in children, define genetic and cultural traits that influence weight gain in various populations, and increase emphasis on developing technologies to produce healthier foods.

⑩ \$38 million in funding to NASS to support the first year of the 2012 Census of Agriculture's five-year cycle. The Jan.-Feb. 2009 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story on the results of the 2007 Census of Agriculture.

For more details on USDA's proposed staffing levels, as well as additional details on other aspects of USDA's proposed budget for FY 2010, click on www.usda.gov/budget. ■

sues, both inside and outside of USDA.

From 1994-97 Reed served as NRCS's Associate Chief. He was the agency's State Conservationist for California, based in Davis, from 1989-94, after being its State Conservationist for Maryland, based in Annapolis, from 1985-89. He began his career with the [then] Soil Conservation Service as a student trainee in Walnut Ridge, AR in 1968, while still in college.

Boyd Rutherford, the previous Assistant Secretary for Administration, is now the Chief Administrative Officer for the Republican National Committee, based in Washington, DC. ■



Doug Caruso is the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency.

Before rejoining USDA, from 2003 until his appointment to this position Caruso served as CEO of Wisconsin Farmers Union Specialty Cheese, a Middleton, WI-based cheese manufacturing startup company—and producer of award-winning Blue and Gorgonzola cheese products—that he helped develop into a profitable operation with expanded market share throughout the country. He served as FSA State Executive Director in Wisconsin, based in Madison, from 1993-2001. During that time he recruited and engaged minority producers in the design and delivery of an employee training program to enhance outreach to historically underserved farmers.

Caruso worked as State Director for U.S. Senator **Herb Kohl** (D-WI) from 1989-93. From 1986-89 he was the Director of Government Affairs and Commodity Programs for the Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives. From 1978-86 he was the General Manager of Family Dairies USA, the nation's sixth largest farmer-owned milk marketing cooperative, after having been its Communications Director from 1973-77.

Teresa Lasseter, the previous Administrator of FSA, returned to her home in Moultrie, GA, where she serves on the Board of the South Georgia Banking Company and is involved in community activities. ■



Julie Paradis is the Administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service.

Before rejoining USDA, from 2001 until she retired from the position in 2006 Paradis served as Senior Washington (DC)

Counsel for America's Second Harvest—currently known as "Feeding America"—which is the nation's largest organization of emergency food providers, comprised of 215 regional food banks and food recovery organizations serving 50,000 food pantries and soup kitchens nationwide.

Paradis served as Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services from 1997-2001. From 1995-97 she was Deputy Counsel of the Minority Staff of the House Agriculture Committee, where she oversaw legislation concerning such matters as nutrition and domestic feeding programs. From 1991-94 she was the Assistant Majority Counsel for the House Agriculture Committee, after having served from 1989-91 as the Staff Director for the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations, and Nutrition. She worked as a Senior Staff Attorney in the Legislative Division of USDA's Office of the General Counsel from 1983-89, after having worked as a Staff Attorney in OGC's Food and Nutrition Division from 1979-83, where she specialized in FNS's Food Stamp Program.

Roberto Salazar, the previous Administrator of FNS, is now President of the Self-Reliance Foundation, a Washington, DC-based non-profit organization that works to empower underserved communities to improve their quality of life. ■

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Sylvester Pope, the Safety and Health Manager for the Rural Development mission area, runs through some of the features that are part of "Accessa-phone" technology—which is designed to ensure that any employee, including individuals with visual, dexterity, or hearing limitations, can have access to a computer-based telephone system. This demonstration unit is located at USDA's TARGET Center in Washington, DC. It's one of the contributions to the TARGET Center made by **Kevin Curtin**, Director of TARGET Programs for the Department. Note the story on page 6.—**PHOTO BY RENEE ALLEN**



Help us find

Brittany Leann Jones

Missing: **2-24-2008** From: **Garden Grove, CA**

D.O.B.: **3-10-1992** Sex: **Female**

Hair: **Black**

Eyes: **Brown**

Height: **5 ft. 4 in.**

Weight: **120 lbs.**

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